

Lost books in the FVB

The St Andrews book project is attempting to create a bibliography of all books published wholly or substantially in the French language before 1601. In such an enterprise the issue of lost books – books published in the period but no longer extant in any surviving copy – looms large.

It is well known to all scholars of the book that many books published in the first era of print have now disappeared. Certain books were simply used to destruction; other (forbidden) books may have been deliberately destroyed. Some classes of cheap print were never intended to be preserved: these include many broadsheet proclamations, advertisements, and civic ordinances. Chance survivals of such documents must represent the tip of a very large iceberg of mundane, everyday print, now otherwise almost wholly disappeared. Occasionally we have chanced across boxes or folders which include several such items, and many individual items survive among classes of manuscript documents preserved in the archives of France, and elsewhere.¹ But the value of such discoveries is certainly enhanced by their extreme rarity.

What this immediately makes clear is that the problem of lost books afflicts different classes of literature in very different ways. The St Andrews project has attempted to log not only all books, but also to locate all surviving copies. This exercise has made clear that some books, and some classes of books, are very far from rare. Larger books – works of history, law, editions of the classics, and popular scientific or topographical texts – often survive in very large numbers.² Even some pamphlets have often survived in decent numbers, particularly if, as often seems to have been the case, they were bound together into collections close to the time of their original publication.³ But the fact that so many of the books in the FVB survive in only one copy (presently, close to half of the total), suggests that a large number of books have disappeared altogether: references to many other classes of contemporary documents, manuscript and printed, tend to confirm this impression.⁴

¹ The Archive Municipale of Troyes (now deposited in Troyes BM) has preserved several *liasse* of local ordinances of the Troyes city council that vastly increase our knowledge of local publishing. Fine examples of local printing preserved among the manuscript letter books of a municipal authority are to be found in the Archives Departementales of Caen.

² Among the contemporary best sellers known to the FVB are the Lyon edition of Froissart's History (1559), known in 89 surviving copies, the 92 surviving copies of the *Histoire ecclesiastique* of 1580, and Guillaume du Choul's *Discours de la religion des anciens romains* (1581), with 64 copies registered.

³ See, for instance, the many surviving copies of the tracts and manifestos of the Duke of Condé published in 1562-63, almost all surviving copies of which are bound into collections. Jean-François Gilmont, 'La première diffusion des Mémoires de Condé par Éloi Gibier en 1562-1563', in P. Aquilon and H.-J. Martin (eds.), *Le livre dans l'Europe de la Renaissance. Actes du XXVIIIe Colloque international d'études humanistes de Tours* (Paris, Promodis, 1988), p. 58-70. A revised and updated version of this article also appears in a recent volume of Gilmont's collected papers: *Le livre & ses secrets* (Louvain-la-Neuve, Presses universitaires de Louvain & Genève, Droz, 2003), pp. 191-216.

⁴ Of the 47,000 editions logged in FVB presently some 22,200 are recorded in only one surviving copy, though this figure will obviously diminish as we move towards completing our census of surviving copies.

The St Andrews project has adopted a number of strategies for reconstructing the corpus of lost books. Individually, none of these strategies offers a total solution to the problem – we will never truly know how many editions, particularly of broadsheets and other ephemeral texts, came off the press during this period. But together these resources make a substantial contribution to filling out knowledge of vernacular publishing that we have from the examination of surviving copies.

In no particular order, the FVB logs information on lost books from the following sources.

Musical part books. In many cases musical part books are known from a surviving copy of only one part: the Superius, Contratenor, Tenor or Bass. In cases where the book was known to have been issued for four part singing, the existence of the missing parts is assumed.

Similarly, where a pamphlet claims to be published in one location, after or in imitation of ('iouxte') another now lost edition, that edition is assumed to have existed. In a very small number of cases the first surviving copy of a work will claim to be the second or third edition, suggesting a first edition now lost. The same goes for controversial works which are replies to works now lost.

In Paris, publishers or booksellers often published in association, with the names and address of each partner on a part of the edition. Sometimes the part edition of one participating bookseller is now lost. This may generally be assumed to have been originally published, particularly if it is part of a series where a copy of most parts has been traced.⁵

Indices of forbidden books. Prohibited books were often hunted to destruction, or disappeared in the course of concealment. Published lists of forbidden books offer a valuable window on editions of texts banned, and not preserved. For France, the most important of these lists are the first early lists published by the theology faculty of the university of Paris, the Sorbonne, in the 1540s. From these lists, professionally edited by Professor Francis Higman, we may reclaim several early Protestant editions not otherwise known from a surviving copy.⁶

Encyclopedia projects. The sixteenth century was the first great age of the encyclopaedic catalogues, and French literature was in this respect particularly well served, with the great bibliographic catalogues of Antoine du Verdier and Du Croix du Maine.⁷ These supply several hundred reasonably full references to books not now identifiable in any library.

Modern library catalogues of books lost through dispersal or war damage also offer traces of lost books. Libraries in France have not suffered to anything like the same

⁵ Such as the octavo and folio Amadis de Gaule series published by the Paris association of Groulleau, Longis and Sertenas. The FVB has now reconstructed almost a complete set of all volumes in the names of all three separate booksellers, but a few strays remain elusive.

⁶ The French volumes appear in J.M. de Bujanda (ed.), *Index des livres interdits* (10 vols., Sherbrooke, 1985-1996).

⁷ *La bibliotheque d'Antoine du Verdier* (Lyon, Honorati, 1585). *Premier volume de la bibliothèque de la Croix du Maine* (Paris, Langelier, 1584).

extent as the rare book collections of Germany, but the bombardments of 1914, 1940 and 1944 still claimed significant casualties, such as the collections of the Bibliothèques Municipales of Calais, Chartres, and Tours. The relatively full nineteenth century catalogue of the last of these libraries offers a glimpse of several untraceable editions. The same may be said of the catalogues of antiquarian book sales, or of dispersed private collections, with relatively full descriptions of books whose present location is unknown – presumably sometimes these editions have disappeared into other private collections beyond the reach of bibliographical description.

In all of these cases relatively accurate and complete descriptions of books offer reasonable, if sometimes frustratingly elusive prospects that the lost editions are credible. Less authoritative are references in contemporary sixteenth century book lists and inventories: either the lists of private libraries or the stock of booksellers and printers, compiled for reasons of valuation after death. Although the valuations here offer extremely important information about the contemporary prices of books in the wholesale trade, the descriptions are seldom sufficiently full to infer with authority the full bibliographical details of books that cannot now be found. The same can be said of printed lists of books compiled for sale at the Frankfurt sale or elsewhere.

Far more suggestive, particularly for the work of provincial presses, are contracts preserved in local archival sources. It may be known, for instance, that a local town authority commissioned an edition of several hundred copies of a local ordinance of edict the contract for which is registered in the local town accounts. Many such references have been extracted by the editors of the relevant volumes of the *Repertoire bibliographique du livre du seizième siècle*, and these references are taken up in FVB.⁸

Obviously such sources, particularly this last, have to be used with care. We cannot assume with certainty that because an edition was commissioned – or because permission was given to an author or printer to publish – that it actually appeared. Similarly, a library catalogue, whether the precocious contemporary work of the literary encyclopaedists, or a modern catalogue, may mistake a detail which creates a unique reference. In libraries that still possess the works many such references turn out, on inspection, to be another, already familiar edition: in collections dispersed, or destroyed by war damage, such a process of elimination is impossible. By adopting these misleading details into our work we risk creating book that never existed, a work known to bibliographers as a ghost.

Specialist studies of particular authors or classes of literature often devote considerable space to debating the merits of such phantom editions, and we have followed the guidance of particular experts in dismissing some improbable editions of this sort.⁹ But for the wider categories of lost books revealed by our investigations, and those of previous bibliographical projects such as the *Repertoire bibliographique*, the case for inclusion is overwhelming. While we must, in a small number of cases, risk creating books that never existed, this category is easily dwarfed by books, and

⁸ See, for instance, the sequence of contracts with local printers recorded in the letter books of the Archives municipal of Bourges, CC 349-CC 646. *Repertoire bibliographique*, vol. 13 (Bourges).

⁹ As for instance in B.T. Chambers, *Bibliography of French Bibles. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century French-language editions of the Scriptures* (Geneva, 1983).

particularly broadsheets, certainly published, but now apparently wholly lost. Anything that can be done to reconstruct this fugitive part of the sixteenth century book world is extremely valuable.

In total, and drawing on all of these separate strands of investigation, such lost books make an extremely important contribution to our bibliography. The FVB lists a total of some 47,500 editions or bibliographically distinct items. Of these ten per cent, or around 5,000 items, have not yet been located in a single surviving copy. That is a very large category, and their reconstruction in itself is a significant contribution to bibliographical scholarship. They can certainly not be ignored in any study of sixteenth century printing, in France or elsewhere.

This is not to say that all of these presently unlocated editions are lost for ever. Very often the searches of the St Andrews book project have located a copy of a book previously known only through a fugitive bibliographical reference: sometimes this way we have confirmed the existence of an edition thought by another expert to be implausible. And the search continues. Particularly satisfying is the small number of books we have literally reclaimed from the shadows: that is, we have identified the book from the shadow imprinted on the final blank verso sheet of a surviving work. An item from a collection may have been disbound, but leaving enough impression from the ink of the title-page on the item that remains to reconstruct its essential details. Such shadowy phantoms include the *Cantique des fideles des eglises de France qui ont vaillamment soustenu pour la parole de Dieu, auquel ils en rendent graces* (Lyon, 1564), a record created for the FVB from the negative of the print on the last page of F 47158 (13), a bound collection in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.¹⁰ This work, clearly part of the busy world of Protestant print in Lyon in the brief interval when the city had fallen into Protestant hands, does not seem to exist otherwise in any surviving copy. In this way the work of inspecting books for our project continues to throw up enticing hints of a busy world of print that may never be wholly recoverable.

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¹⁰ CANTIQVE || DES FIDELES DES || EGLISES DE FRANCE QVI ONT || vaillamment soustenu pour la || parole de Dieu, auquel || ils en rendent || graces. || A LYON. || [-] || M. D. LXIII. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, F 47158 (13 bis). This reconstruction is the achievement of Dr Malcolm Walsby, St Andrews project coordinator for France.